

**NEW X-MEN**

ISSUE 24

CRUSADE PART 1 (OF 4)

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FIRST DRAFT

12/23/05

FAO Mike Marts

ARTIST'S NOTE: This issue is exceedingly dark and grim, both at the attack on the bus and at the funeral. We hope this issue conveys the darkest day in X-Men history. It is crucial that the visuals capture the horror and panic at the bus attack and the deep sorrow and trauma felt by our young heroes at the funeral. These events have forever changed every X-Man.

When we get to the color stage, the flashbacks at the attack should be painted with reds, yellows, browns and oranges to capture the fiery feel of that nightmarish evening. All cool colors should be avoided in these scenes. This pallet shift will also help the reader clearly follow the moves from present to past throughout the issue.

Thanks!

Chris and Craig

**RECAP/PAGE ONE****PREVIOUSLY IN NEW X-MEN (TEXT BLOCK ONE)**

Three weeks ago, mutants numbered in the millions. But after the events known as 'M-Day,' only hundreds remain. The student body at the Xavier Institute has been decimated, leaving just a handful with their powers intact.

The school's two most advanced squads, the New Mutants and Hellions, have suffered losses. PRODIGY, WINDDANCER and TAG all lost their powers. WITHER, wrongly believing his death touch was neutralized, accidentally maimed WALLFLOWER. His guilt as well as a perceived betrayal by his teammates caused him to run away from the Institute. ICARUS is found on the school's doorstep with his wings AMPUTATED. And against EMMA FROST's wishes, the child assassin X-23 is allowed to return to the institute and join student body.

In an effort to prepare the children for the dark future ahead, Emma has disbanded the school's squad system and chosen a select group of students who will train as X-MEN.

**IMAGE**

ECU on a CRUCIFIX, part of a set of ROSARY BEADS. They hang down from NIGHTCRAWLER'S BLUE THREE FINGERED hands, which hold an OPEN BIBLE.

NIGHTCRAWLER; "I am the resurrection and the life..."

**CRUSADE (TEXT BLOCK TWO)**

A year before "M-Day," William Stryker predicted it's arrival... and in the months prior, he recruited men, women, doctors and killers by saving them or their loved ones from certain death in acts that can only be described as "miracles." His followers, now an army, call him a prophet.

Emma Frost arranges for the remaining human students to safely leave the Institute under cover of night, but as the bus full of children pulls away, a single ROCKET strikes the side of the vehicle, detonating in a fiery explosion.

REVEREND WILLIAM STRYKER's second crusade has begun...

**PAGE TWO**

1/ THE XAVIER CEMETARY, ON THE INSTITUTE GROUNDS. It's a grey skied, overcast day. The sun burns bright, but only a few beams of light pierce through the clouds, not enough to lighten the dark and somber mood of the day.

CLOSE on NIGHTCRAWLER's FACE. Grim. He looks down and OFF PANEL at the BIBLE he holds. He wears a BLACK SUIT AND TIE (not a priest's uniform). We can't tell where we are yet. People stand behind and to the side of Kurt, but we're tight enough on Kurt's face, so that we only see the shoulders of the others in the PANEL.

[NOTE: everyone in attendance at the FUNERAL wears appropriate funeral attire; i.e. black suits, dresses, etc. EMMA is NOT in attendance.

NIGHTCRAWLER; "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

CAPTION; KURT WAGNER. NIGHTCRAWLER.

2/ WIDER - KURT faces us. We now see he holds a BIBLE, and that SHADOWCAT, ICEMAN, MARVEL GIRL, ROGUE, KARMA, MAGMA and FORGE stand near and huddled around him. Marvel Girl is openly weeping, as is Kitty. The others look shell shocked as Kurt READS on.

NIGHTCRAWLER; "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison..."

3/ LOW - in the FOREGROUND, six PALLBEARERS carry a CASKET past several STUDENTS [NOTE: see list of remaining students, but do not use the NEW X-MEN. Cuckoos, Blindfold, Hisako, Anole, Pixie, Nezhno are fine.]

The PALLBEARERS; COLOSSUS, WOLVERINE, GAMBIT, CYCLOPS, CANNONBALL, and BEAST all look sad but none have tears in their eyes as they carry the coffin.

NIGHTCRAWLER;            "Because we look not to the things that  
                             are seen but to the things that are  
                             unseen..."

4/ THE GRAVE. LOW, FACING THE HEADSTONE. The pallbearers LOWER the CASKET into the GRAVE, which blocks the name on the headstone from view.

NIGHTCRAWLER;            "...for the things that are seen are  
                             transient."

5/ SAME EXACT SHOT. Now fully lowered, we can see the headstone.

It reads, 'Brian Cruz'

NIGHTCRAWLER;            "The things that are unseen are  
                             eternal."

**PAGE THREE**

1/ We stand WITHIN the crowd of STUDENTS, positioned right behind the NEW X-MEN, so we cannot see their faces. But as we look through and past the group of New X-Men, we see Nightcrawler as he continues to speak. He looks up from the bible, facing the New X-Men and us.

NIGHTCRAWLER;                We have come together to honor a life  
   that has touched many of us...

2/ On the PALLBEARERS, now mixed within the CROWD of students and X-Men gathered around Nightcrawler. We see 40-50 people clustered in a small area, all of them from the X-Men family. Cyclops and Wolverine stand next to one another.

NIGHTCRAWLER;                All of us who knew him, we're blessed  
   to be apart of his journey...

3/ CLOSE ON SCOTT AND LOGAN, they solemnly look towards the grave.

CYCLOPS;                        Look at the world we've given these  
   kids. How are they supposed to deal  
   with this?

WOLVERINE;                    They'll learn. Or they'll die. Simple  
   as that. And whoever's responsible for  
   this?

WOLVERINE;                    They'll just die.

CYCLOPS;                        Fine by me.

CAPTION;                        SCOTT SUMMERS.    CYCLOPS.

CAPTION;                        LOGAN.    WOLVERINE.

(CONT'D)

4/ REVERSE - CLOSE ON MERCURY. Her face, wet with tears. She wears a long, sleeveless BLACK DRESS. On either side and slightly behind her, we see Julian's SHOULDER and Santo from the neck down but the only face we can see is Mercury's.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); Today we must remember the life, not  
the death, of our fallen friend..

5/ TIGHTER ON MERCURY - her white, reflective eyes, filling with tears. Her face shows that her heart and soul have broken with sadness.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); ...for our memories are what keep our  
loved ones with us, long after they  
have left our side.

CAPTION; CESSILY KINCAID. MERCURY.

PAGE FOUR

1/ THE ATTACK, JUST OUTSIDE WESTCHESTER. THREE DAYS AGO, as seen at the end of issue 23. The black night sky illuminated by the blazing bus INFERNO. Ash, sparks and SMOKE fill the scene.

CLOSE ON MERCURY, SCREAMING. AS ON THE COVER.

MERCURY; NOOOO!!!

2/ BIG - REVERSE - from behind the New X-Men. One second AFTER the explosion. Flames reach high up into the sky, where they meet a deep black cloud. We see our team in SILHOUETTE, the burning HUSK of the BUS in front of them (in the b.g. of the panel).

The wreckage and debris have scattered all over, and two separate sections of the bus, torn apart and open and before them.

NO DIALOGUE

3/ ON MERCURY, her hands raised to the sides of her head as she continues to scream. Next to her, we see SURGE with a desperate but determined look on her face. She takes off RUNNING (with electric speed!)

MERCURY; NOOOOOOOOO!!!

SURGE SFX; ZZZZZT!!

PAGE FIVE

1/ IN THE WRECKAGE. Electricity COURSES over Surge as she runs into the FLAMING WRECKAGE. The flames inside OBVIOUSLY BURN her as she moves through them but she doesn't care. We can see the arms and legs of dead children scattered throughout the wreckage.

SURGE;                    This can't be happening... This can't be-

2/ CLOSER ON SURGE. As she PULLS on a chunk of METAL. There's a dead GIRL (RUBBERMAID) under it.

**SURGE;** Oh, no... Andrea...

**SURGE;**                      **Help me!!!**

3/ CLOSE ON SURGE'S FACE. Flames lapping at her. Eyes wet from the SMOKE and FLAMES around her. She yells out for help.

**SURGE;                      SOMEONE HELP ME!!**

4/ BACK AT THE FUNERAL. CLOSE ON SURGE'S FACE. STONE COLD. You can see burn marks on her face.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); The value of a life is not judged by  
it's length but rather by how it is  
lived...

CAPTION; NORIKO ASHIDA. SURGE.

5/ WIDER ON SURGE - revealing her right SHOULDER completely bandaged, it covers a massive BURN. She looks empty, drained of emotion. DAVID ALLEYNE stands next to her. He has tears in his eyes but she does not.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); It is what we do with the time we are given, that matters.



**PAGE SIX**

1/ WIDER - one row back, off to the side of David and behind MERCURY, stands ROCKSLIDE.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); Did we do more good than harm? Did we make more friends than enemies?

2/ CLOSE ON ROCKSLIDE - he looks like he's been punched in the stomach. Like he's going to throw up.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); Did we do all that we could for those we love? Those are the questions we should ask ourselves...

CAPTION; SANTO VACCARRO. ROCKSLIDE.

3/ THE ATTACK. ON ROCKSLIDE, as at the funeral, but now we see black sky behind him and glowing embers blow in front of his face. He stands motionless in shock, wide eyed with his mouth half open unable to speak.

SURGE (OFF); Help me!!!

4/ WIDER - as HELLION and MERCURY finally snap into action. MERCURY turns liquid arcing up and moving toward the BUS (OFF PANEL) while HELLION rises up with his TELEKINESIS but our focus is still on ROCKSLIDE who stays behind them. He can't move.

SURGE (OFF); SOMEONE HELP ME!!!

5/ ROCKSLIDE FALLS TO HIS KNEES. His face exactly the same as before, painted with shock. He can't comprehend what just happened or what he's seeing. He's helpless.

ROCKSLIDE; Wh- what happened?

6/ CLOSE ON HELLION, turning back to look at Rockslide, his face a mask of fury.

HELLION; SANTO! GET UP!! SANTO!!!

**PAGE SEVEN**

1/ BACK ON ROCKSLIDE, now at the FUNERAL. His eyes fill with TEARS.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); As I look around the sad faces gathered here today, I can see what a deep impact this life made on all of us.

2/ ECU ON ROCKSLIDE'S EYES/CHEEKS. The tears move down and through the cracks and ridges of Rockslide's stony face.

NIGHTCRAWLER OFF); Today we must say goodbye to a dear friend.

3/ PROFILE SHOT - ON HELLION. We can see NIGHTCRAWLER in the b.g. on the left side of the PANEL. We can ONLY see Hellion's LEFT SIDE, IN PROFILE.

NIGHTCRAWLER; I know I speak for everyone when I say..

CAPTION; JULIAN KELLER. HELLION.

4/ CLOSER ON HELLION, still in PROFILE/SAME ANGLE. Like SURGE, he's stone cold. No emotion.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); We love and miss you, Brian.

5/ SAME EXACT SHOT - but now at the ATTACK (b.g. flames, smoke, embers, etc.) We see Hellion's PROFILE exactly as above, but now SCREAMING out his friend's name. As opposed to the FUNERAL, Hellion now explodes with emotion.

HELLION; BRIAAAAANNN!!

PAGE EIGHT

1/ Behind HELLIION, floating mid air, he RIPS open the bus with his TK power. SURGE, already inside the wreckage searches for survivors.

**SFX;                    SHRACK!!**

2/ CLOSER ON HELLION. Now 'inside' the wreckage area. Surrounded by charred, bent metal and flames, Hellion looks around, frantically looking for his friend. In the b.g., there are bodies everywhere.

HELLION;            Brian!! Where are you?! Come on...  
you're okay... you've got to be...

HELLION;                   BRIAN, WHERE ARE YOU?!

3/ LONG SHOT ON HELLION. He turns, looking toward CAMERA. We see in the F.G., BRIAN CRUZ's DEAD HAND and FACE in PANEL, most of his fallen body buried under burning rubble.

HELLION ;                      BRIAN !

4/ ON BRIAN'S DEAD BODY. There's a PIECE of BUS ENGINE near him, which is spilling GASOLINE. There are FLAMES everywhere as HELLION comes toward him from the background, now on foot. Rushing to get to his friend.

HELLION; I'm coming, Brian! Just hold on--

5/ BOOM! WIDE - As the engine EXPLODES behind Hellion's RIGHT side in a massive fireball. The blast BLOWS HELLION to the side and away from his dead friend.

**SFX; BOOOOM!**

**PAGE NINE**

1/ THE FUNERAL. Now we see HELLION full face for the first time, and the entire RIGHT SIDE of his face is BLACK and BLUE, with SCARRED OVER cuts and abrasions. His right eye, nearly swollen shut. He looks grim as he looks down at the casket of his friend.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); Such friendships are what we live for.  
They are not to be cast aside but  
rather honored as we move forward in  
our own journey.

2/ WIDER - HELLION AND MERCURY STAND, but several kids behind them stands X-23. She watches HELLION intently.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); Brian will always be part of us.

3/ CLOSE ON X-23 - her head slightly cocked to one side as she takes in Hellion. She looks like a puppy trying to understand its owner. She searches for something through her gaze but her shows no sign of emotion.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); For these are the very bonds that make  
us human.

CAPTION; LAURA X. X-23.

4/ SAME SHOT, AT THE ATTACK. X-23's eyes now however reflect the FIRE in front of her. Although we're CLOSE ON HER FACE, she's IN ACTION, slashing at the wreckage.

HELLION (OFF); Just hold on--

SFX; BOOM!

5/ WIDE - X-23 slashes at a large piece of METAL, under which we will find MARK SHEPPARD (although we can't tell yet). In the BACKGROUND, the ENGINE EXPLOSION has just occurred, and HELLION'S BODY COMES FLYING OUT like a COMET, leaving a trail of SMOKE and FIRE as he SHOOTS out backwards.

SFX (SLICING); SHRRRK!!

SFX (HELLION); SHOOOM!

DJ; Uhhhh...

PAGE TEN

1/ CLOSE ON X-23 as she looks down and pulls a shard piece of metal away. Calm and calculated.

DJ (OFF); Help... help me...

2/ OTS X-23 - MARK SHPEPPARD aka DJ. We can only see him from the collarbones UP. He's ALIVE, but coughing up blood as he DIES.

DJ; KAHK! HuHH!

DJ; H- hey... you're... pretty.

3/ WIDE - ELIXIR drops to his KNEES beside MARK (we still can't see DJ's ABDOMEN). Mark is DEAD at this point. Elixir looks FRANTIC.

ELIXIR; DJ! MARK!!

4/ LOOKING UP AT ELIXIR and X-23 as they look down at MARK. Elixir has his hands on MARK, OFF PANEL. Elixir is still frantic, confused. X-23 is looking at ELIXIR, not MARK.

ELIXIR; I'm here, buddy. You're gonna be fine.

5/ WIDER - NEW ANGLE - REVEAL MARK'S BODY. A massive piece of SHRAPNEL sticks straight out of his stomach, nearly cutting the boy in half. Mark's eyes are dead. He's gone.

X-23 pulls Elixir off his dead friend so that he can see that his friend is long gone.

ELIXIR; You're gonna be fine. I'll fix--

X-23; He's dead.

6/ ON ELIXIR AND X-23, as he angrily PUSHES X-23 away.

ELIXIR;                                      Get away from me! I can save him!

7/ CLOSE ON ELIXER as he continues to try in vein to REVIVE the dead boy. His HANDS pressing down on Mark's bloody body it looks like he's giving CPR to a drowning victim.

ELIXIR;                                      COME ON, DJ! You're going to be okay...  
I can fix you... I can fix you...

**PAGE ELEVEN**

1/ ELIXIR's FACE. AT THE FUNERAL. He's not sad, not stone faced... he's FURIOUS. He SHAKES with RAGE.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); At times like these it is easy to focus on our anger... at the injustice... at our own failures.

CAPTION; JOSH FOLEY. ELIXIR.

2/ WIDER - WALLFLOWER stands at ELIXIR's side, her head against his shoulder. She cries. She wears a black SHAWL that covers her WITHERED ARM, and her GOOD ARM holds Josh's hand.

WALLFLOWER; Josh... it's not your fault...

WALLFLOWER; Josh...

3/ 'PAN' RIGHT - DUST stands beside WALLFLOWER, in her BURQUA. She has a BLACK VEIL over the open area of her face.

NIGHTCRAWLER (OFF); But we must have faith that from darkness, light will come.

4/ CLOSE ON DUST - we can see her face through the BURQUA and she too CRYs. She whispers an ISLAMIC PRAYER.

CAPTION; SOORAYA QADIR. DUST.

**DUST (SMALL); Allahumm-aj'alh-u-lana faratan-waj'alh-u-lana ajran wa zukhran waj'alh-u-lana shafi'an-wa mushaffa'an**

DUST (TRANSLATED); "Oh Allah! Cause him to become a means of salvation for us, and cause his loss to become a means of reward and recompense for us, and make him for us an intercessor whose intercession be granted by Thee."



5/ THE ATTACK - SAME SHOT, but we're looking at DUST in MID-TRANSFORMATION. Really cool, dramatic shot of her powers. Half her physical body, her sand 'face' is shooting forward. Dust as always is calm, level headed.

SFX; WHSSSSS!

NO DIALOGUE

PAGE TWELVE

1/ BIG, WIDE - fully in sand form now, Dust blows across the wreckage like a sandstorm.

SFX; WHOOOOOSH!

2/ IN THE WRECKAGE - Dust blows across flames, making them flutter and go out.

SFX; WHOOOOOSH!

3/ ON SURGE, just as a SECTION OF BUS above her FALLS, nailing her in the shoulder (which we see bandaged in the FUNERAL SCENES). Dust in her sand form blows past, and in the SKY we see CANNONBALL as he rockets toward the wreckage.

SFX; CRACK!!

SURGE; AHHH!

DUST (OFF); Noriko!!

4/ DUST reforms behind SURGE, her sand gathering and coalescing into her human form. The top half of Dust's body now completely reformed, she now HOLDS the unconscious Surge. Surge face, badly burned and her shoulder deeply wounded. Surrounding the two girls in the wreckage we see the rest of Dust's sand form gathering and moving towards her solid body.

DUST; Noriko! Hold on, I'll get--

5/ CLOSE ON DUST - she's looking around her eyes wide.

DUST; --help...

6/ WIDE - DUST AND SURGE are surrounded by DEAD KIDS. It's like an open grave of bodies and wreckage and fire.

NO DIALOGUE

PAGE THIRTEEN

1/ A LITTLE WIDER, including DUST and SURGE's heads. Surge still rests on Dust out cold, but now Dust visibly (in her eyes) FREAKS OUT. The sight of all these dead children is just too much for her to handle.

There's FIRE behind them, threatening.

DUST;                      No... no... Allah, no...

DUST; NOO!!

2/ WIDER as MERCURY's metal form streams in between the FLAMES and the two girls. She's wrapping around them to protect them.

**MERCURY;                      Sooraya!**

**DUST;                      AAAAHHHHHH !!**

3/ SMALL - DUST is just GONE. She's SCREAMING as MERCURY (her upper torso and arms forming out of the mercury shield she's created) puts her hands on Dust's shoulders, trying to calm her down. But Mercury herself is crying.

DUST;                    AHHHHH!

**MERCURY;** Sooraya, please... it's okay...

4/     SMALL - PAF!!   A massive SPOTLIGHT shines down on the three girls. Surge is unconscious, but Mercury and Dust shield their eyes as they look up at...

**SFX;                      PAF!!**

MERCURY; Uh!!

5/ BIG - REVESRE - MERCURY's POV - the light is blinding, but we can make out the 'face' of an O\*N\*E SENTINEL (similar to the cover of X-MEN 178), its open PALM raised at them as if to fire on them. The light emitting from the machine's CHEST, creating a scary silhouette against the smoke and ember filled sky.

O\*N\*E SENTINEL;        Attention, mutants! You are not  
authorized to be...

O\*N\*E SENTINEL;        Oh, dear god.

**PAGE FOURTEEN**

1/ SHORT, WIDE INSERT - THE FUNERAL.

CLOSE ON THE BIBLE as Nightcrawler's hands CLOSE IT.

NIGHTCRAWLER;            May God have mercy on our souls.

NIGHTCRAWLER;            Amen.

2/ ANGLE ON SURGE, as she stands over the OPEN GRAVE.  
The funeral now OVER, we see the black dressed X-Characters  
leave behind Nori in the b.g. SURGE remains, alone and  
stares blankly into the grave.

NO DIALOGUE

3/ Close on Nori and FORGE, approaching her from the  
background.

SURGE;                    Why?

4/ SMALL - CLOSER ON FORGE, looking down to SURGE (he's  
taller). There's infinite sadness on his face.

FORGE;                    There's no answer to that question.

FORGE;                    All we can do now is be strong for  
those that remain.

SURGE;                    How are we supposed to get past this?

FORGE;                    Part of you never will.

CAPTION;                  FORGE. MAKER.

5/     SMALL - CLOSE ON NORI - she can't meet his gaze.

FORGE (OFF);                I have to go back to Dallas for a  
while, but you can always contact me  
through your gauntlets. All of my  
machines talk to one another.

FORGE;                      I'll always be there to listen.

6/     WIDER ON FORGE AND SURGE, he puts a hand on her  
shoulder as they turn and follow the others..

FORGE;                      Come on, I'll walk with you..

**PAGE FIFTEEN**

FULL SPLASH

LONG ON THE XAVIER CEMETARY. In the background, we can see the MANSION and the O\*N\*E SENTINELS keeping watch in the distance.

The crowd of kids and X-Men aren't leaving the cemetery - they're simply moving to the next GRAVE. The once small little cemetery now has **FOURTEEN** OPEN GRAVES AND COFFINS waiting for them.

This scene should feel like an aerial shot of the funeral we opened on. The same six PALLBEARERS carry a new coffin to the awaiting open grave. Nightcrawler holds the bible and speaks to the group. These mourners have thirteen more funerals to attend today. These are the children that were abandoned by their families and left for the X-Men to burry.

FORGE;                      We still have a long day ahead...

**PAGE SIXTEEN**

1/ ESTABLISH THE INSTITUTE. Looking up at the main building, with the PHOENIX MONUMENT in the f.g. of the shot.

PSYLOCKE (OFF);        THIS is the protection you offer?!

2/ THE X-MEN 'SITUATION' ROOM, as seen in UNCANNY 466. PSYLOCKE is right in O\*N\*E SQUAD LEADER LEXINGTON'S FACE. She's FURIOUS.

PSYLOCKE;                We have forty-two dead children!

LEXINGTON;              This was NOT our fault!

PSYLOCKE;                We had to bury fifteen of our own  
because even in death their families  
didn't want them!

CAPTION;                 ELISABETH BRADDOCK. PSYLOCKE.

CAPTION;                 ALEXANDER LEXINGTON. SENTINEL SQUAD  
LEADER.

3/ WIDE ON THE ROOM. VAL COOPER, COLONEL REYES, and BISHOP are there as well. It's a heated conversation, and Val, Reyes and Lexington look just as pissed as the X-Men.

BISHOP;                  Psylocke...

PSYLOCKE;                No! We tolerate your presence, and for  
what?

REYES;                    Make no mistake... our presence is NOT up  
for discussion.

REYES;                    You X-Men made a choice to circumvent  
O\*N\*E protection by smuggling out the  
remaining human students.

BISHOP;                  As if you would have just let them go.



4/ CLOSER ON PSYLOCKE/LEXINGTON. Bishop literally holds Psylocke back.

LEXINGTON; We are here to help y-

PSYLOCKE; Brilliant job you've done so far!

5/ ON VAL COOPER, livid.

COOPER; That's enough!

COOPER; This is a terrible tragedy and you have our sympathy. We will do everything possible we to find those responsible...

COOPER; But if anyone is to blame here...

**PAGE SEVENTEEN**

1/ THE XAVIER INSTITUTE - WIDE INSIDE EMMA'S OFFICE. As seen in New X-Men 21, it's big. Emma sits at her desk. She looks shell shocked as she stares down at her desk.

COOPER (OFF);                    It's Emma Frost.

2/ CLOSE ON EMMA'S FACE. She continues to look down and even though she does not weep, the deep sorrow she feels is painted across her face.

NO DIALOGUE

3/ EMMA POV, on her desks her hands holding a school picture of TAG and beneath it, scattered across the desk are the school photographs of EVERY dead child.

NO DIALOGUE

4/ CLOSE ON HER FINGERS AND HANDS, now in diamond flesh. She rakes her nails across her desk leaving deep gouges in the surface and curled wood under her fingertips.

SFX;                                    SCHREEETCH

5/ CLOSE ON EMMA'S FACE, NOW PURE DIAMOND. Her expression free of emotion and now just ice cold.

CAPTION;                                EMMA FROST. HEADMISTRESS.

**PAGE EIGHTEEN**

1/ The Institute grounds. HELLION and MERCURY walk alone together after the FUNERAL, still dressed in suit and dress.

MERCURY; I can't believe they're gone.

MERCURY; That... that Brian is gone.

HELLION; It isn't supposed to be like this.

2/ TIGHT ON HELLION. He looks DRAINED.

HELLION; I'm going to check on Sofia, make sure she's okay.

3/ TIGHT ON MERCURY, looking at Hellion with a confused look on her face.

MERCURY; What are you talking about?

HELLION; She wasn't at the funeral. I just want to check on her...

MERCURY; Julian... she's gone. She left the day of the attack.

4/ ON THE TWO OF THEM - HELLION looks at MERCURY with a confused and ANGRY stare.

HELLION; That's crazy... Sofia's not gone.

MERCURY; Julian... I... some guy came and picked her up, her butler or something.

MERCURY; Oh, Julian... I thought she said goodbye.

5/ ON MERCURY, who watches HELLION RUN OFF TOWARD THE DORMS. Her shoulders slump, and the day just got worse for her if that's even possible.

HELLION;                      Not funny, Cess!

MERCURY;                      Julian wait!

MERCURY (softly);      I'm sorry.

**PAGE NINETEEN**

1/ DAVID AND SURGE, focus on Surge. Inside Surge's DORM ROOM, she BREAKS DOWN into David's arms, SOBBING. He has tears in his eyes as well.

SURGE; All I can think about is what if it was you, David? What if I lost you too?

DAVID; Shhhh... it's okay... I'm not going anywhere. I'm right here...

2/ ROCKSLIDE. In the de-powered DANGER ROOM, ROCKSLIDE is on his KNEES, pounding his FISTS into the FLOOR. The floor of the Danger Room is shattered all around him.

SFX; BOOOM!

ROCKSLIDE; I'm sorry, Brian! I'm SORRY!!

3/ DUST AND X-23. X-23 sits in a chair and simply WATCHES as Dust, her BURQUA now OFF, slumps in a corner and CRIES, the KORAN clutched to her bosom. Even if X-23 knew what to do, it wouldn't matter.

DUST (SMALL); ...faratan-waj'alh-u-lana ajran wa  
zukhran waj'alh-u-lana shafi'an-wa  
mushaffa'an... Allahumm-aj'alh-u-lana...

4/ CLOSE ON HELLION. He stands in the doorway of Sofia's room. We can see inside but he wears a heart wrenching shocked expression.

HELLION (softly); Sofia?

5/ WIDE from Behind Hellion in SOFIA'S ROOM, now EMPTY. The bed stripped, the desk cleared off, a closet door open revealing it's empty. We can see TK power gathers around Hellion's fists as he looks on.

[NOTE: WALLFLOWER HAS MOVED TO A NEW ROOM]

NO DIALOGUE

6/ CRASH!! OUTISDE THE MANSION, AT SOFIA'S WINDOWS. A massive TK BURST SMASHES OUT ALL THE WINDOWS AND WALLS of the empty room, taking the brunt of HELLION'S HEARTBREAK.

HELLION (OFF);           SOFIA!!!!

SFX;                    CHOOOOM!!!

**PAGE TWENTY**

1/ THE INFIRMARY. CLOSE ON JAY GUTHRIE. He looks like fucking death. He's sits up in his bed. His bandages still on, his wings still cut off. He's got an IV in, and is hooked up to monitors. Giant black bags under his eyes. Skin pale white, sickly.

He's holds his hands to his head, tears in his eyes.  
They've just told him about the attack.

JAY;                      What? No! That... that can't be!

JAY; NO!

2/ WIDER - PAIGE GUTHRIE/HUSK sits with him, consoling him. We look in through the INFIRMARY WINDOW from outside. We can see the reflection, out of focus, of SCOTT SUMMERS and SAM GUTHRIE as they watch.

SAM; I... I just couldn't tell him. He's closer to Paige anyway, but... I just don't know what to say.

SAM; I was right there, Scott. I saw it coming. The bus had already left...

SAM; I couldn't get there fast enough.

3/ REVERSE - ON SAM AND SCOTT. Scott is grim, and Sam looks like his heart has been torn out as he watches his brother.

SAM; I couldn't save all those kids... I  
couldn't help Jay...

SCOTT;                    You can't blame yourself, Sam.

4/ ON JAY, eyes wide. He looks desperate. As if he really, really can't believe this has happened.

JAY; ...nonononono...

SAM (OFF); He's not getting better, is he?

5/ BACK ON SAM and SCOTT. Sam leans one arm against the glass, his forehead touching in.

SCOTT;                   No. For some reason his healing factor isn't active and he won't let Elixir help him.

SCOTT;                   I'm sorry, Sam.



**PAGE TWENTY-ONE**

1/ The Xavier Institute COMMON ROOM, as seen in NEW X-MEN  
21. WIDE on the COUCHES as the SEVEN NEW X-MEN (SURGE,  
HELLION, MERCURY, ELIXIR, ROCKSLIDE, DUST and X-23) sit.  
Most are slouched down, half laying.

With the exception of X-23, they are totally depressed.  
Totally silent. There aren't words for what they're  
feeling. They're not in costume (except X-23 and Dust) but  
just regular clothes.

NO DIALOGUE

2/ FROM BEHIND EMMA FROST in a doorway, looking over the  
team. She's not in her diamond for anymore, just her  
normal X-uniform.

EMMA; I know what you're going through.

3/ ON ROCKSLIDE, ELIXIR, MERCURY and X-23 look up at her.  
In total disbelief, except X-23.

EMMA (OFF); I know you want nothing more than for  
it to go away. To wake up from this  
nightmare.

4/ ON HELLION, DUST and SURGE. Dust's eyes look so hurt  
and wounded. Hellion and Surge look too drained to be  
pissed at her.

EMMA (OFF); But this is our lives now...

EMMA (OFF); And even in our darkest hour, the X-Men  
must find a way to push on.

5/ ON EMMA in the doorway. She looks paler than normal.

EMMA;                    So I need you to pick yourselves up and  
                              meet me in the Danger Room in ten  
                              minutes. We have to train...

6/ TIGHT ON EMMA'S FACE. Resolute.

EMMA;                    For I fear this has just begun.

**PAGE TWENTY-TWO**

1/ ESTABLISH - Stryker's NEW YORK CITY base of operations MIDNIGHT. A tall, gothic CATHEDRAL nestled in with all the skyscrapers. Light pours from the many stain glass windows and even though this is a house of God, it feels more like a castle than a church - very foreboding.

CAPTION; NEW YORK CITY

CAPTION; THE CHURCH OF THE REVEREND WILLIAM STRYKER

STRYKER (OFF); Thee alone we acknowledge as God and King, Thee we invoke as our helper. From Thee we have obtained our victories, through Thee conquered our enemies.

2/ INSIDE THE CHURCH. Stryker is on his knees, his formal ROBES on as he prays before the ALTAR.

STRYKER; Thee we thank for past favors, from Thee we hope for future favors. Thee we all beseech, and we pray Thee that Thou long preserve to us unarmed and victorious our God-loving sons.

STRYKER; Amen.

3/ TWO LAYMEN in white robes take Stryker's FORMAL ROBES off him, with Stryker holding his arms out in a cross to help them. Underneath, he wears his black suit and gold CROSS.

LAYMAN; Purifier Wallace has requested your presence. It is about the vision.

STRYKER; Thank you, my son.

(CONT'D)

4/     INSIDE THE TECH ROOM (see issue 23). Two STEEL DOORS slide open, revealing STRYKER. The room has SERVERS and COMPUTERS lining the walls, and everything is bathed in a GREEN / BLUE light.

STRYKER;                    Tell me... are the changes as far reaching as we expected?

5/     The TECH PURIFIER sits at his workstation, facing US. Stryker approaches behind him, looking at the same screens (off panel) that the tech is. The Purifier smiles.

WALLACE;                    Oh, yes Reverend.

**PAGE TWENTY-THREE**

1/ CLOSE ON THE ROUND GLASSES of the PURIFIER TECH (as seen in NXM 23). He's looking up at STRYKER, who we can see in the REFLECTION. The LIGHT of the MONITOR he's in front of washes over him.

WALLACE; Just as you predicted.

2/ ON STRYKER, looking on over the tech's shoulder.

STRYKER; Do not doubt God's gifts, my son.

WALLACE; Never, Reverend.

WALLACE; After the last strike, only a handful of obstacles remain on the day.

3/ SMALL - CLOSE ON THE TECH'S HANDS, TYPING AT A KEYBOARD.

WALLACE (OFF); Another has been marked as an omega threat.

4/ CLOSER ON STRYKER, SMILING.

STRYKER; Excellent. Now we know who our next target must be.

5/ BIG - ON THE MONITOR - a photo of WALLFLOWER AND ELIXIR. They look really happy. [NOTE: TAKEN PRIOR TO WALLFLOWER'S HAND BEING WITHERED, SIMILAR TO THE COVER OF THE YEARBOOK]

NO DIALOGUE

**TO BE CONTINUED.**